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SUBJECT: PALESTINIAN LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ELECTIONS SITREP
#11: JANUARY 24, 2006: SENIOR FATAH ACTIVIST KILLED IN
NABLUS; ALLEGED USG FUNDING CRITICIZED

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: A senior Fatah activist associated with Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) candidate Ghassan Shakaa was killed in Nablus early on January 24, reportedly by gunmen associated with rival Fatah leader Jamal al-Tirawi. Large Fatah and Hamas rallies on January 23 marked the official end of campaigning in the West Bank and Gaza. Hamas candidates criticized alleged USG funding of Fatah candidates. Hamas released a statement saying a senior member of its military wing had escaped an assassination attempt in Gaza. The Israeli High Court rejected a petition to prevent Hamas and PFLP from participating in PLC elections in Jerusalem. Voting by PA Security Forces (PASF) ended on January 23. CEC officials estimated a turnout of over 92 percent of eligible, registered security personnel. END SUMMARY.

Senior Fatah Activist
Killed in Nablus

12. (C) Ahmad Hasounah, a senior Fatah activist was shot and killed in Nablus reportedly by gunmen affiliated with a rival Fatah faction. Hasounah has been a prominent member of Fatah PLC candidate Ghassan Shakaa's campaign staff. Local contacts speculated to ConGen POL FSN that individuals associated with al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades (AMB) leader Jamal al-Tirawi were responsible for the killing. Rival Fatah factions exchanged fire later in the day in the vicinity of Balata Camp. Reportedly, no one was injured. Acting Governor of Nablus Said Abu Ali told POL FSN during a January 24 telcon that mounting tensions in the city between the factions may effect voter turnout on Election Day, but said he will do everything possible to prevent clashes.

Large Rallies Mark
End of Campaigning

13. (C) Election campaigning officially ended January 23. Nearly 30,000 Fatah members and supporters gathered in Khan Yunis in a final campaign rally. Ten Fatah independent candidates announced during the rally that they are pulling out of the race in favor of the official Fatah candidates. Hamas supporters marched in Gaza City, Ramallah, Nablus and other areas in a show of force ahead of Election Day.

Reports of USG Funding for
Fatah Criticized

¶4. (C) Hamas PLC candidate Ismael Hanniyah (National List/Number 1) said reports of USG funding of PLC candidates constitute a blatant violation of "America's supposed democratic principles." Hanniyah said money tainted with "the blood of Arabs and Muslims" would not detract from Hamas's popularity and Palestinians will reject any leaders who come to power with USG financial or military assistance. Several Palestinian factions, including Hamas, PFLP, DFLP, FIDA, and National Struggle Front, released statements condemning the alleged US funding of Fatah candidates and demanding an investigation. Central Elections Committee (CEC) Director Ammar Dweik defended the USG during a January 23 televised debate, explaining funds were provided to the PA and not PLC candidates. Consul General categorically denied that the USG provided funds to candidates or political parties in a January 24 TV interview with Ma'an News Agency. The interview has aired twice on Ma'an's network of 11 stations in the West Bank and Gaza.

Fattuh Pushing for Post-Election Fatah Reforms

¶5. (C) During a January 24 interview with local reporters, PLC Speaker Rawhi Fattuh warned that certain armed groups are planning to attack polling stations on Election Day. Fattuh said that after the PLC election he will propose expanding the membership of the Fatah Central Committee (FCC) from 17 to 100 members and expanding the Fatah Revolutionary Council (FRC) from 120 to 250 members. Fattuh also said that his proposal includes establishing a political bureau of 25 members to lead the movement. Fattuh is not running in the PLC elections, but has called for restructuring Fatah during the campaign

Attempted Assassination of

Hamas Military Leader

¶6. (C) Hamas released a statement saying a senior member of its military wing in Gaza City, 'Abd al-Hadi Siam, escaped a January 23 assassination attempt in Gaza City. The statement said that the individuals responsible are known to Hamas and that they will be held accountable after the election. ConGen contacts reported Siam was not hurt in the attack and that the individuals responsible for the attack were also responsible for January 4 killing of Hamas activist Rami Adlo.

GOI High Court Declines to Intervene in Jerusalem Vote

¶7. (SBU) The Israeli High Court of Justice rejected a petition made by Palmah Ze'evi, son of the assassinated Tourism Minister, and MK Gilad Erdan to prevent Hamas and PFLP from participating in the PLC elections in Jerusalem. The panel of three judges, including Supreme Court President Aharon Barak, did not issue a statement explaining their decision

Media Reports:

¶8. (SBU) Campaigning for the Palestinian legislative elections came to a close yesterday, and the three main Palestinian dailies reported that more than 90% of the security forces have voted. Reports also noted that preparations are under way for public voting tomorrow.

-- The papers carried the Palestinian government's call for all Palestinians to exercise their right -- and national duty -- to vote. Al-Ayyam carried above-the-fold pictures of Palestinians taking part in a Fatah campaigning event in Khan Yunis in the Gaza Strip.

-- Al-Hayat Al-Jadida ran a story on international observers,

and noted that their presence in every voting center reflects the world's interest in the Palestinian legislative elections.

-- The former Prime Minister of Sweden, who is leading an international monitoring team, was quoted in the dailies as saying that he expects the upcoming legislative elections to have more credibility than the presidential elections did last year.

-- Al-Quds reported that the Israeli forces broke into the village of Surbaher, near Jerusalem, and removed all campaigning posters.

-- The newspapers announced that in an effort to allow Palestinian legislative elections to proceed smoothly, Israel ordered its military forces to not carry out any operations in the West Bank from tomorrow morning until midnight.

Op-eds:

-- Al-Quds editorialized that regardless of which party, faction or movement wins seats in the next legislative council, the international forces must respect the Palestinian people's decision and allow the next cabinet to carry out its difficult duties and mission.&

-- Hasan al-Batal opined in Al-Ayyam that Americans know that democratic Palestinian elections that in turn lead to a democratic Palestinian state would help the United States to "whiten its misdeeds" of imposing democracy by force in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

-- Ahmad Bahr commented in Al-Quds that no party or faction can deal with the (Israeli-Palestinian) conflict unilaterally. Thus, as Hamas shares this responsibility it will direct its action toward the larger national project at Palestinian, regional, Islamic and international levels.

-- Mohammad Madhoun commented in Al-Quds that a potential win for Hamas will not only be a victory for this group but also for the whole Islamic movement in the region, especially for those groups that adopt moderate views of Islam such as the Muslim Brotherhood.

-- Ayman Yusuf opined in Al-Quds that by participating in the elections, Hamas seems to have realized that its sacrifices, including the substantial loss of life among its members,

must now be coupled with political participation.

WALLES